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The Gift I Would Like to Return:
Single Baptist Women in Kazakhstan

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Abstract

This dissertation will focus on single women in the Russian speaking Baptist churches of Kazakhstan. The question of singleness, particularly of women is a vital one among Baptists but has drawn little attention for the further study and open discussion regarding the subject.

This dissertation will consist of three chapters. The first chapter will provide a general overview of singleness in Kazakhstan and a specific overview of singleness within the Baptist churches in Kazakhstan. It will provide statistical data, an overview of the society and cultural specifics of two influential factors: Baptist subculture and central Asian mentality. Also there will be a description of the image of Baptist women in Kazakhstan and what factors have become crucial for formation of this image. One of the important aspects of this chapter is the focus on the convictions that Baptists have concerning single women and women in general and in what way those convictions impact the attitude of men to the women and on women's self-perception.

The second chapter is meant to draw attention to the difficulties and needs that single women face. These needs and difficulties will be analyzed from three different levels. First, the physical level, what kind of problems, needs and drives singles have regarding their 'body' and in what way are these different from the needs of married women. Second, the communal level: how the family, Church community and broader society impact the life of single women and vice versa: What influence single women have on communal life. Third, the spiritual level, there will be a discussion of the specific difficulties that singles likely have in their spiritual journey.

The third chapter will be a theological reflection on the concept of freedom. The argument will be for an understanding of freedom *from* to an understanding of freedom *for* relations. What single women are not free from and what they might live for? Such understanding of freedom, i.e. freedom for, requires liberation from the limitations of 'freedom from': when this liberation happens one becomes free for something or someone. This chapter will have three parts as well: first, a discussion of being free from physical/sexual pressure, for a healthy expression of one's sexuality. Second is freedom from ideas and dreams that enslave the minds of singles and make them think and live in the particular: this freedom from is a shift to freedom for creativity and more possibilities for a better/fruitful life for and with the others. Lastly, the freedom from cultural

captivity for life of freedom for Christ: how His promise of life in abundance might be fulfilled in the lives of single women.

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Introduction

More than three years ago I got a message from one of my good friends who was a member of a Russian speaking Baptist Church in Kazakhstan[1]. It was an invitation for a meeting in her house, the reason for the meeting was kept secret. I was told that some people I knew well would also come, but no one else should be told about this meeting. An exciting invitation! It looked like a gathering of undercover agents in an appointed place! The reasons for the secrecy and confidentiality of those gatherings became a starting point and led into a sequence of issues that I want to explore in this dissertation. We all were single young women, age 27 and older: there was nothing extraordinary or scary about us. In those gatherings we discussed practical questions and spiritual doubts or discoveries that ordinary single women have. The secrecy of the meetings was necessary due to embarrassment among the women to talk about singleness as a problem. Another reason was that the discussion of ethical and theological questions that singles might have was such that we would have been expected to invite an ordained man from the Baptist church to which we belong, to interpret the biblical passages on this particular issue for us.

Why about Singleness?

The question of singleness among women in Baptist churches of Kazakhstan is vital but in spite of that it seems to be little discussed (sometimes even ignored) and studied. In this dissertation, as a single woman, I would like to bring some insights and reflections from personal experience and also from the experience of single woman from different Baptist Churches with a similar background. In order to minimize subjectivity, the research will be done in the sphere of singleness and how this question relates to contemporary Christianity in various Christian communities and for various individuals. The subject of singleness will be explored from the perspective of Central-Asian, Russian speaking, urban Baptist woman. It will explore in what way cultural and doctrinal aspects are influential in the lives of single women and what consequences follow. The main motivation for this research has been my personal interest in the subject and desire to study it in order to help single women with a similar background in this particular context. Also encouragement for the writing has come from single women themselves

[1] The Baptist movement in Kazakhstan was started in 1903 from a small community in the North-Western region. Nowadays Baptists communities number 12,000 members of which approximately 90% are Russian speakers and only 10% are native Kazakhs. For more background on Kazakhstan's Baptists, see Constantine Prokhorov, 'Baptist History in Kazakhstan,' in John H.Y. Briggs (ed.), *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought*, foreword by David Coffey, (Milton Keynes, Colorado Springs, Hyderabad: Paternoster, 2009), p.285-286.

hoping for someone to address the issue and explore singleness from the perspective of 'one who belongs to the same camp'. The main concentration of this dissertation is not a discussion of why women are single but what, if anything, they should do with their singleness

There is no literature available which has been written specifically for this context. Another aspect is that the available literature from other contexts is mostly directed to teaching singles how to find a husband, how to change yourself in order to become more attractive to the opposite sex, how to walk a spiritual journey so God will grant you a husband, etc., but not how to endure singleness and be a content person. Therefore this dissertation will be written with the help of contemporary writers who do not belong to this particular Central-Asian context but who are experts in the questions of singlehood or describe their journey from a perspective of someone who has or is experiencing it personally.

My Focus

This research is directed primarily with the urban single Baptist women of Kazakhstan. At some points it will be necessary to refer to singles of the other countries of Central Asia. Due to the fact that the churches of Baptist Unions of Central Asia have so much in common[2] (doctrines, traditions, liturgy, etc.), subjectivity may thus be minimized. However although post-soviet Baptists are so similar there are always some exceptions and generalizations should be avoided. The limitation of this dissertation is that the subject of singleness is addressed only for the women in Russian-speaking Baptist congregations because not much interest will be expressed in the subject except the interest of singles themselves. The reason for the ethnic limitation is the cultural differences between Russian and Kazakh speaking Baptists.[3] Moreover, this work will be confined to single adult[4] women in urban contexts: they have both more opportunities and more challenges entailed by urban life.

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[2] Because of the rapid growth of the Baptist movement and its wide spread in Russia (during the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th) the number of evangelicals reached 800,000. Stepnoi Kray (Степной Край) with the centre in Omsk in 1882- 1972 embraced the entire North-Eastern part of Kazakhstan. The central Baptist church in Omsk took care of many of the first Evangelical communities in Kazakhstan and those, in their turn, helped their fellow Christians in the rest of Central Asia. Due to severe persecutions and massive exiles of those who disagreed with the new Soviet ideology accepted after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, many of those evangelicals, mainly Mennonites and Baptists, were sent to Siberia, Kazakhstan and Middle Asia (now Central Asia). Those exiled Christians tried to save their identity and protect their beliefs during the whole period of the Soviet regime. That became the reason Baptists all over the post-Soviet Union area shared so much in common. Konstantin Prokhorov, *Божье и кесарево: [рассказы, статьи]* (God's and Caesar's: [stories, articles]), (Omsk, Russia: Izdatel'skii dom "Nauka", 2005), p.249.

[3] The Kazakh speaking Baptists are influenced by their ethnic culture much more than the Russian speaking ones are by the Russian culture. The reason is that many Russian speakers (not necessarily Russians by their nationality) moved to Kazakhstan during the time of massive building of factories and development of agrarian culture (1960-70) from all over the Soviet area and formed a mixed culture where to identify national belonging and cultural identity would be quite difficult. *Большая*

Method and Structure.

The main approach to the question of singleness will be the holistic approach to human beings suggested by James McClendon Jr., a prominent Baptist theologian. He argues the vital importance of taking in consideration the main aspects of the life of a person in order to understand what kind of problems can appear and how to deal with them if every part of the whole is included. Those aspects are: physical, social and spiritual[5]. His interest very much concentrates on convictional theology[6]: in other words - what are our convictions? How do they form our personality? To what extend are our convictions influenced by the culture or community we live in? Why do our convictions need revision and, if necessary, transformation? This dissertation will explore the impact of convictions on attitudes towards singles and in what way those convictions might be changed so that singles will be able to be treated properly and even enjoy the stage they are in.

As mentioned above, the sources used for the writing of this dissertation are mainly taken from the Western experience. The reason is there is no available literature that has been written on the subject of singleness for a particular Central Asian context. Also, there are will be some older sources used, which are worthy to be included because of the wisdom they contain which has been tested throughout the years. Another reason is that to a great extent the problems, challenges and changes that Evangelical Christians in the West experienced 20 years ago, Central Asian Evangelicals have experienced only recently.

This dissertation will consist of an introduction, three main chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter will demonstrate how the question of singleness has become a burning one for the Baptists of Kazakhstan. The number of single women is growing globally and affects Christian singles sometimes

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Советская Энциклопедия (Big Soviet Encyclopedia), (http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/bse/92161/Казахская), accessed 28.03.2011. Moreover, ideologically the keeping of identity would not be treated nicely among the people: they had a strong sense of belonging to the Soviet Union and that was more important than any other identity. In the case of Russian speaking Baptists they were influenced by the surrounding Soviet multinational culture and Baptist subculture which is a mix of German Baptists and Mennonites, Russian and Ukrainian Baptists. K. Prokhorov, *Божье и кесарев,* p. 261.

[4] This dissertation is mainly addressed to single women in their late twenties and older.

[5] In *Ethics* McClendon calls those aspects slightly different: bodily, which represents the personhood and its needs as an embodied creature; communal, which represents the life of a person in community and its influence on each other; and the last aspect is anastatic which is in this work is called 'spiritual' and reflects beliefs of a person and life according to those beliefs. James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), *passim.*

[6] McClendon argues that convictions or beliefs form a person and a community in a particular shape: the change of convictions makes a person or community different than they were before. Therefore convictions must be taken seriously because they contain the power for making people and communities what they are. James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Convictions: defusing religious relativism*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994), p.5-7.

even more than secular women who are single. The question of singleness has frequently been a painful one for women. The societal tendency is that the subject of singleness is more a problematic sphere of life now than 20-30 years ago. The aim of the whole chapter is to introduce to the reader an outside view on singleness, that will be provided by statistics and an overview of the society and also a view on singleness from inside Baptist communities, which will be provided by an overview of conversations with Baptist single women in Kazakhstan. In this chapter there will be reflections on the convictions Baptists have concerning singleness and especially woman's singleness: in what way those convictions help or damage single women; how those convictions are influenced by both the surrounding culture and the Baptist subculture.

In the second chapter the question of the difficulties, needs and barriers that singles encounter will be touched. The aim of this chapter is to show that singleness is not just an artificially created concept but a reality which needs special attention and should be treated as seriously as many other realities the contemporary church faces. This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first one will show that there are physical needs not only about sexual longing but other issues such as bulimia, diets, specific female health problems, depression which influences not only mental disease but affects health in general. Sexual longings and lack of knowledge of how to approach to woman's sexuality are a concern of the majority of single Baptist women. The second part will touch upon the question of what sort of concerns and problems singles face in communal life: what methods singles use to overcome loneliness, how they are treated by their families, why being an educated and independent single woman is not an advantage in the Baptist subculture and why life in community not always is able to substitute the family. The third part of this chapter will point out some spiritual struggles that singles are battling: why God is silent; what kind of plan He has for my single life, if He has any; does He loves me less then my married friends and if that is true, what I have done wrong; etc.

The third chapter will be a theological reflection on the concept of freedom. The main argument will be based on freedom FROM – freedom FOR relations. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the most famous theologians of the last century, interpreted real freedom as freedom FOR, but first, to become a contented member of a broader community an individual has to be content personally and that requires freedom FROM: freedom from prejudices that are created around singles/singleness and also freedom

for living the content life God meant for him/her[7] despite marital status and life circumstances. It will be important to point out that freedom brings responsibilities. In this chapter also there will be a reflection on spirituality (particularly contemplations on freedom) of the women and men who have experienced singleness: how they found a depth of relationship with God in their spiritual journey.

Chapter I.

Broken Identity: what does it mean to be a Single Baptist Woman?

1. Statistically Proven: Lots of Women are Likely to Stay Single.

The population of Kazakhstan is 15,399,437; 70% of that number are adults between 15-64 (male 5,279,292/female 5,534,607).[8] According to the statistics the ratio of men to women is 9 males to 10 females[9]. So, statistically every 10th woman in Kazakhstan is expected to be single. If we consider that the average life span of a man is shorter than that of a woman, it makes chances to have a lifelong marriage or to have it at all amount to nothing for almost 255,315 females. In spite of being very primitive statistically and including all other aspects such as divorce, remarriage, cohabitation and having a lover, being married to another person: all these things taken together which are not limited to Kazakhstan proves that Kazakhstan is not an exception in this complicated worldwide situation around marriage and singleness.

Kazakhstan is a patriarchal society. The family bonds for ethnic Kazakhs are strongly protected by members of the extended family of relatives. The head of the family is a man who is supposed to take care of all of the needs of the family. Also it is a society with a highly developed hierarchical system. 'Everyone has a distinct place in the hierarchy based upon family relationships. […]Kazakhs expect either the eldest or the person with the highest position to make decisions that are in the best interest of the group.' [10] This family structure is very similar to the one that is practiced in Russian-speaking Baptist

[7] The Bible, John 8:36; John 10:10; Romans 8:28.
[8] Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html), accessed 27.09.2010.
[9] UNDATA the world of information, Kazakhstan, (http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Kazakhstan), accessed 27.09.2010.
[10] Kazakhstan - Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette, (http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kazakhstan.html), accessed 30.09.2010.

families: the father should be the head and 'a priest' of the house and the wife and children should have submissive roles. Many Baptist women were brought up with this idea and hold this attitude**.**

In spite of opportunities that women have gotten recently in society of living alone and being independent, the value of family influences the way people treat each other inside the same society. The usual first question asked in an occasional meeting of young people who have not seen each other for a while, would be 'Are you married already? No!? Why!? What are you waiting for!?' Singleness would be treated as a sign of all sorts of problems: physical, psychological and social but definitely problems[11]. The concept of voluntary singleness even for the secular society would provoke thoughts about some secret reasons for remaining unmarried: a disability for childbearing, psychological problems, secret relationships with a married man, etc. The influence of the family–centered society is stirred up by the massive wave of the romantically preoccupied young generation.

Perhaps the following sentences sound very critical but in order to be objective avoiding criticism is impossible. It is painful and shameful to admit that the Baptist subculture, as it exists in Kazakhstan, in many ways breaks woman's identity, no matter if married or single. If, to take as an example, the teenage years of women brought up in a Baptist environment and in their late twenties or thirties now, there will be many small nuances that formed those young girls in a particular image of Baptist woman. Many of these young women struggle with complexes and low self-esteem. The situation is not moving much towards improvement. It is fair to admit that contemporary young Baptist girls are not constrained as much as the previous generation. Hopefully by the time they reach their thirties the question of singleness will not be as painful and neglected as it has been so far. Here will be some examples and insights to ways Baptist women, single and married, get their identities broken. When asked 'what factors impact your fear to remain single?' one single woman replied in the following way:

> 'First of all it is fear to be lonely and the attitude of the others towards singles. Quite often you feel like a lower social class. In the church community you are 'outboard' of life. Your married peers have different interests, such as married life, children, etc. You do not share common interests with those who are much younger due to age differences. It is inappropriate to speak

[11]A similar idea is pointed out in the work of Lina Andronoviene: she describes the attitude to singles as losers with problematic characters and profoundly unhappiness. For the more information see Lina Andronoviene, *Involuntarily Free or Voluntarily Bound: Singleness in the Baptistic Churches of Post-Communist Europe,* (Prague: IBTS, 2003), p.13.

> about your singleness in the church because you will be considered as not spiritual enough that you are thinking about carnal desires'.[12]

Drawing the picture of the male-female question in Baptist churches of Kazakhstan we will see that the percent of males is tremendously low in comparison to the percent of females[13]. Commonly the Baptist congregations are called churches with a woman's face. The life of a single woman is absolutely different to the life of a single man. Many in the church look at single woman with a compassion that brings her to shameful feelings of being rejected or belonging to a club of 'leftovers'. On the contrary, not so many men are treated the same way. A single man is an eternal potential boyfriend and husband: independent of age and physical attraction.[14]

Being brought up in the Baptist church since I was a teenager, all the young people in our congregation were strongly instructed that dating, in order to protect young people from sexual temptations, should be for a short period of time and would be possible only with following intentions for marriage[15]. All other reasons for dating were considered as inappropriate. Now this prohibition does not exist anymore but the Biblical prohibition of premarital sex is one the reasons that makes young people get married at a slightly early age.[16] The word 'singleness' among young women never appeals to positive feelings. If this word were to be translated from English into Russian the first meaning would be 'loneliness' which may refer to a marital status but more to the psychological condition. The dread that the word 'singleness' brings is a fear of loneliness. This fear motivates young Christian girls to get married to 'the first comer'. So the fear of staying single chases young girls because of their numerical superiority to boys once they enter the ages of 18-19 and forces some of them to make reckless steps towards miserable marriages. In my life I have known a couple of cases when the young girl was told that this particular man would destroy her life but her answer was: 'What if no one else proposes me? I do not want to stay single for the rest of my life like those old maids!' Unfortunately those marriages were problematic but the choice had been made.

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[12] Uliya, single Baptist woman, age 31, Kazakhstan, from the personal interview available from the author, 10.08.2010.
[13] In some churches it will be 20-30% males to 80-70% of females.
[14] L. Andronoviene, *Involuntarily Free.,* p.14.
[15] In Baptist tradition the discernment of the will of God for the finding of the future spouse was at the core of decision-making regarding marriage: thus it followed that knowing the will of God meant long-term dating was no longer needed.
[16] The average age of newlyweds in Baptist churches of Almaty for the last 2-3 years for males and females is 22. This average age was calculated with a sample of about 20 new families. The tendency is that children raised in Christian families tend to get married earlier than young people coming from non-Christian traditions. There was even a saying that one of the single Baptist women, 25 years old, was told by Baptist young man: 'Until age 21 the women to be snatched away but after they pass this age become leftovers'.

2. The Impact of Two Cultures: Central-Asian and Baptistic Subculture.

In Central Asian countries family values and especially childbearing are still very important. The necessity of having a husband for Kazakh Christians is not conditioned by tradition only: Muslims might consider the absence of a husband as a curse from God that proves the wrongness of those who have been converted into Christianity from Islam.[17] At this point it has to be underlined that the question of singleness (mainly woman's singleness) is not only a problem for Baptists but touches family-centered Kazakh society as well. As one of the solutions for the concern is the legalization of polygamy which has been proposed and supported by some Islamic religious groups[18]. This is what was written as a reflection in defense of legalization of polygamy in Kazakhstan:

> 'Many single women would like to have children but are afraid of not being able to afford that financially. The perspective of facing parenthood without any psychological support hinders many of them from the step towards that. But the matter of time and physical abilities, according to some medical researchers, is pressing on them. If they have an opportunity to create a full-valued family and live with their husband in the position of 'токал' (younger second and third wife) they would be happy and able to have children.'[19]

This is in contrast to Western society, where childbearing has become less viewed as a necessary part of a full-grown family[20]. Although the 'Kazakhstan's Law on Marriage and the Family' prohibits polygamy'[21] this the way a large percent of citizens[22] see the possible solution of the issue.

Unfortunately, the 'old maids' might become a living reminder for young girls of possible lonely futures but also they might be looked on as a potential danger for the married women. The majority of Baptist churches in Kazakhstan are quite strict about relations between genders. Traditionally Baptists call each other brothers and sisters, but this is far from the real meaning of those words. Sisterhood and brotherhood presuppose family relations: brothers and sisters are people who share the greatest part of their life but in many Baptist churches it is just the way people in congregations call each other. Still our

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[17] Respondent A, from personal interviews with a single Baptist woman converted into Christianity from a Muslim background, available from the author. Some of the interviewed asked that their names to be withheld.

[18] В Казахстане Вновь Изучается Вопрос Легализации Многоженства, (The Question of Legalization of Polygamy has been explored in Kazakhstan again), translated from Russian, (http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=678), accessed 28.09.2010.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Kristin Aune, *Single Women: Challenge to the Church?,* (Cumpria, CA: Authentic Media, 2003), p.2.

[21] SIGI Social Institutions & Gender Index, Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Kazakhstan, (http://genderindex.org/country/kazakhstan), accessed 30.09.2010.

[22] According to a public opinion poll, in 2002 40% of men and 22% of women did not mind polygamy, (http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=678), accesses 30.09.2010.

congregations are very male-dominated. Concerning women in the church: many think that their best features are submission and humbleness (1 Peter 3:3-4)[23]; demanding, not even asking these features from women complicates the relations between the genders. Another reason for those sometimes difficult relations is that there are not so many men in the congregations and they are a highly protected minority[24]. To get a husband is in a way 'good luck'. Unfortunately the singles are not very welcome to many families because of the possible interest of the husbands in those singles. From personal experience, many men will treat single woman differently in the presence of their wives. The feeling that singles are 'the dangerous elements' of Church subculture is constantly present in the minds of singles.[25] On the other hand, it would be fair to admit that there are many friendly families that are able to treat singles absolutely independently on their marital status as it should be. Singles are not only a threat for the younger generation and for married couples: they are a threat for themselves. They struggle with accepting the fact that they are still singles. In doing the research for this dissertation, 17 single Baptist women were interviewed,. One of the questions was: 'Do you think that you might have a gift of singleness?' and 100% of the answers were 'No'.[26] It is very cultural for Baptist women in Kazakhstan to hide the feeling that they desperately want to have a family and children. Those oppressed feelings do not let singles be themselves and name things as they are.

3. What Kind of Convictions do Baptists have about Singleness?

In the very male-dominated communities of Baptists, women have to learn how to survive and this is said without any exaggeration. There is a mix of cultural and dogmatic matters that make the spiritual and social journey tough. It became a bit complicated to divide which was the influence of the Asian culture, which cannot be ignored, and which was the impact of Baptistic tradition. There are some logical conclusions which were made while I was observing the situation.

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[23] 1 Peter 3:3-4 **'**Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the *lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit*, which is very precious in God's sight.' The words 'quiet spirit' would be considered equal to 1Corinthians 14:34 '*women should be silent in the churches*. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.'

[24] In one of my papers for 'Church and Social Ethics' course I touched upon the question of different attitudes to men and women in Baptist Churches of Kazakhstan. Anna Vershina, *'Dirty subject' or 'Gift from God'?: - Why Baptists in Post Soviet Countries do not speak about Sex and Sexuality.*, (Church and Social Ethics, IBTS, 2010).

[25] Paul Tournier, *The adventure of living,* translated by Edwin Hudson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1976, 1965), p.132.

[26] All of the women either live in Kazakhstan or are from the post-Soviet area. The interviews are available from the author.

a) The question of humbleness and submission is the first one on a scale of priorities that are directed towards Baptist women. Baptist churches are very male dominated. Submission is a main quality of a 'good Christian woman'. Having ones own opinion is not considered as a good feature of any woman. Those who dare to express opinions to males are treated as not humble enough.

b) Baptists have always been concerned about the appearance of their females. For many generations Baptist women of post-Soviet space would have very particular images though these images would be common for the majority. It has been quite easy to recognize Baptist women on the street because of their particular form of clothing: it should express modesty. However, the concept of modesty might be different from person to person. In order to avoid many conversations on this topic from about 10-15- years ago Baptists have had a very strict policy concerning clothes: long skirts (preferably without slits), no trousers, in some churches only long sleeves were allowed and obligatory head coverings as a sign of being married. The interesting fact is that the policy was mainly directed to women. There was no need to talk about putting on make-up, having a haircut and the wearing of jewelry: for Baptists those were not even in existence.[27] Only some very rebellious young women would cross those strict borders. They would then be judged not only by authoritative brothers[28] but all members of the community, including other women. Following a common soviet expression 'Хоть и безобразно, зато однообразно!'[29]. Making all those different and colorful personalities look the same was considered as a natural process of sanctification and was a sigh of humbleness. Likewise the absent of humbleness was judged by what you wore and how you looked .

c) The Baptist churches are to be led only by men and not just men but married ones. Hardly any of them had been through singleness. Because of the small number of men in the Baptists churches, they

[27] Even if the situation in some of the Baptists churches has slightly changed, the main position of the Union stays the same. Позиция Союза церквей ЕХБ Казахстана (Position of Union of ECB of Kazakhstan), An Official site of Kazakh Baptists. In the statement number six, in a row with drinking of alcohol, abortion, smocking, dancing, etc., there is a comment on humbleness in appearance and taboo on wearing jewelry, (http://www.baptist.kz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=358), accessed 8.04.2011.

[28] In Baptists' understanding, 'Authoritative brothers' are those who have been ordained as a deacon or presbyter. Baptists believe in a special power of ordination, and necessity for obedience to the pastors, as anointed ones. Alexander Popov , *The Evangelical Christian-Baptists in the Soviet Union as a Hermeneutical Community: Examining the Identity of the All-Union Council of the ECB (AUCECB) through the Way the Bible was used in its Publications,* (Prague: University of Wales: IBTS, 2010), p.176.

[29] 'Even if it looks ugly, it looks the same and brings unity' (translated from Russian) In spite of the fact that this expression was much used to define the idea of common social class for all of the soviet people, it very much reflects the way Baptists wanted to be different from secular people and at the same time to be recognized in the same society by the way they looked.

always had a wide range of choice: there was no need for Baptist men to think a lot about the danger of staying single forever and ever because of a female deficit: there was no such deficit at all. It is understandable that for many men in the church it is very complicated or almost impossible to get to the point of the complexity of singlehood. Only a few of them who have single daughters are able to understand but only to certain extent.

d) If it happens that a Baptist woman is not married then God will use her singleness to serve the others much more than He might use her married sisters.[30]. It is considered that singles do have a lot of free time, they are not tied taking care of their husband and children, they can serve 24 hours a day and they should not complain because it is a sign of absent humbleness. Once a single woman gets married she becomes an unreliable member of the community because she is expected to have children and be very busy with taking care of her family. It is considered as unreasonable to invest any finances in a woman's Christian education because she does not need it (male leadership in the church) and she is not reliable[31]. Perhaps most of the single women will remain single for the life-long period but still they have a small chance to get married and the investment would be for nothing: this is the opinion often expressed by men in Baptist churches of Kazakhstan.

In the words of a 35 year old woman her singleness was treated in a following way:

> 'I was very depressed for a couple of months because of my singleness and all of the consequences that singleness brings. As a few months of my depression passed, I had decided that I needed prayer support, which as it was expected, I could get from the pastors of my church. I went to meet them and the first question for me expressed their concern that something serious might have happened. When I said that nothing had happened and I had come because I was depressed, weary of being alone and I needed prayers, they answered: 'Praise God nothing has happened!' During the conversation one of them confirmed that he was not going to look for a husband for me, another one said that at my age I can get a different kind of proposals and probably I should not be very picky. I went out of the meeting being more depressed then I was before. I just simply cried and regretted the idea of asking for pastoral prayer.' [32]

Although there are so many singles in the Baptist churches there are hardly any sermons preached on this subject and especially if singleness relates to the issue of celibacy.[33]If the secular

[30] L. Andronoviene, *Involuntarily free.,* p.24.
[31] This opinion was expressed quite often during the entering exams to one of the faculties where I was part of the staff (2005-2008). Bible Institute, Kazakhstan, Almaty, Faculty of Musical Ministry.
[32] Respondent B, personal interview available from the author.
[33] K. Aune, *Single Women: Challenge to the Church?,* p.19.

society solves the question of singleness in many different ways, Baptists prefer not to solve the problem at all if the solution might lead to any sort of compromise. The situation concerning common marriages in the churches is in a very high degree different to the secular society: premarital sex is prohibited and there is a practice of church discipline (excommunication) if the fact of cohabitation takes place. The same punishment by exclusion awaits most of those who decided to get married to a non-Christian man or a member of another denomination.[34]

There is a very different attitude to singles in the churches: for some they are the objects of compassion, for others - the hunters for a husband and for the majority they actually do not exist. Very often singles are considered as proud or independent to a large extent. Sometimes they are blamed that it is their fault for being single because they do not behave right, they do not look right, they say things that are not right, they do not pray right[35]. Actually they are simply 'not right'! And of course many of singles will find this 'impropriety' and blame themselves for all failures, broken relationships and eventually for singleness. If not for their families, friends and other singles, life could become quite unbearable.

This is the image of many single Baptist women: deeply wounded creatures with a cracked view of this world; voiceless victims who do not know how to be protected from the pain or, in the contrary, are proud and too independent. They are objects of people's curiosity 'why she is still alone?' and often of false compassion following broken relationships or unrequited love that again looks more like curiosity than concern. Baptist singles are a society of the faceless in a sense of being unnoticed and speechless. Not infrequently they are inclined towards psychological and spiritual masochism. They are 'not allowed' to express their pain because everyone knows the answer 'she behaves this way because she is alone!' They are not allowed culturally to show their feelings towards any man; most of them do not know how to communicate with any single man[36] because they are embarrassed to express any shade of interest or are afraid that they might become an object of interest for an 'unsuitable' single man. They have to be very careful in communicating with married man. The life of single women in Baptist churches is very complicated. To be fair I have to notice that not all singles are nice personalities: some of them are difficult to be with. The older they become the more complicated their characters are and their brokenness is more visible.

[34] Excommunication for marriage to a member of a Charismatic church is practiced in many Baptist churches of my home city.
[35] L. Andronoviene, *Involuntarily free,* p.24.
[36] K. Aune, *Single Women: Challenge to the Church?,* p.27.

Chapter II.

Life in Singlehood.

1. Singles are also embodied creatures!

a) Self-esteem and self image.

There is a common prejudice that the most important thing that singles have to sacrifice is sex.[37] But sex is not only the issue on the physical level that singles face. In fact nowadays in society the body and what relates to it has been idolized. Because of this over emphasis on the physical body another sort of encounter with physiology issues such as eating disorders[38], diets, depression leading to physical sickness, etc., have appeared. Single women[39] are likely to suffer from eating disorders as they are psychological diseases mostly caused by low self -esteem[40]. Singles often have a narrow focus about such issues thinking they apply mostly to themselves and might become surprised if they realized that eating and overweight are as painful and as pressing a topic for the married as they are for singles.

The act of eating is a God created gift which does not include only the sustaining of life but also the pleasure of tasting food and the communal feature of sharing food. But the concept of eating has become so poisoned during the last few decades. The number of victims of eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa, continues to grow rapidly.[41] Even if Christians consider themselves more protected from different types of eating disorders it is a delusion.[42] The subject has almost never been mentioned in Baptist churches of Kazakhstan. Food is a one of the most important issues of our life. In a

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[37] Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional & Modern Options*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p.100.

[38] Eating disorders are health problems that are provoked by concern with the weight of the body. For broader information see '*NationalEatingDisorders.org',* (http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org), accessed 8.04.2011.

[39] The gender ratio for eating disorders is nine women to one man. Elizabeth Palmberg, *Body Language*, (Sojourners Magazine. Washington: Apr 2009. Vol. 38, Iss. 4) p. 32, 5 pgs.

[40] As mentioned before, low self-esteem is one of the problems of single women in Baptist churches.

[41] Even a simple search on the internet gives a number of references to the growing statistics of eating disorders all over the world. (http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/information-resources/general-information.php#facts-statistics, http://www.nedic.ca/knowthefacts/statistics.shtml, http://www.eatingdisorders.org.nz/index.php?id=765), accessed 10.04.2011. Surprisingly, there are no statistics provided by Kazakh medical organizations for number of cases of eating disorders. One of the reasons might be the cultural difference between Asia and the West: the industry of psychological help is not developed to that extend in Central Asia as it is in the West. Central Asian women would be quite ashamed to go for help with fighting one of the eating disorders.

[42] Karen Swallow Prior, *The Gospel of Grace for Women Who Self-Injure,* (http://blog.christianitytoday.com/women/2011/02/the_gospel_of_grace_for_women.html), accessed 8.04.2011.

communal sense food has a binding role: especially in Kazakhstan among Baptists food is a sign of hospitality and sharing meals is not only sharing of food but part of life. In this sense such eating disorders as bulimia, anorexia or overeating destroy not only physical health but also psychological health as they touch such an important part of life and may cause self-judgment and self-hatred[43] because it is not only a personal issue but touches communal life as well.

Elizabeth Palmberg, from her American perspective,[44] points out four lies that hinder women to fight eating disorders: 1.We are not able to satisfy our bodily needs; 2. being thin makes life happy and dreams come true; 3. will-power is the way to success; 4.a woman has to deal with this shameful disease on her own.[45] Unfortunately all of these lies have a tremendous effect on single women for the majority of them consider their marital status has been caused by their unattractive physical condition. Such comments as 'She has to lose weight if she wants to get married' are quite commonly heard even among church members.[46] 'How can Christians help heal broken minds and bodies if we idolize those same values [as the world]?',[47] asks Palmberg. She sees the way for recovery only in changes of both attitudes: of the community and individuals. Eating disorders are not something that might be healed apart from the help of others because they are diseases in some ways created by others. The church should become a place where human dignity is to be built and an in-God's-image-created identity emphasized.

Singles, being not self-confident enough and blaming themselves for a lack of physical attraction[48], quite often become the victims of any sort of exploitation. More than 30 years ago Paul Tournier wrote how the selling market manipulated the emotions of women and made them buy what they thought they needed.[49] Over the years these manipulative skills were improved to a large extend and now women are not even able to recognize that the whole fashion-body-make-up-success industry is manipulative. It is part of the contemporary world which demands more and more every single day. This is how Henry Nouwen, a life-long single person, reflected on the surrounding world's manipulations:

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[43] Dick Benner, *Food as a Wedge Issue,* (Canadian Mennonite, Waterloo: Nov 2, 2009, Vol. 13, Iss. 21), p.1,2.
[44] Due to the fact that the subject of eating disorders is not much discussed among Christian Baptists in Central Asia, it is necessary to turn for help to the American or Western writers on the subject, as they have more experience in dealing with this issue.
[45] E. Palmberg, *Body Language*, p.32, 5 pgs.
[46] From the experience of single women in Baptist churches in Kazakhstan.
[47] E. Palmberg, *Body Language*, p.32, 5 pgs.
[48] Al Hsu , *The Single issue,* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p.28.
[49] Paul Tournier, *Gift of Feeling*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1979) p.67.

> '…the world and its demons conspire me to think about myself as worthless, useless, and negligible. Many consumerist economies stay afloat by manipulating the low self-esteem of their consumers and by creating spiritual expectations through material means. As long as I kept 'small', I can easily be seduced to buy things, meet people, or go places that promise a radical change in self-concept even though they are totally incapable of bringing this about.'[50]

b) Reproductive Issues.

Being a single and celibate woman is quite hard from many perspectives. One of those appears each time when a single woman is reminded by doctors that in order to live a healthier life she should have, even if not a stable sexual life, at least to give birth when she is still able to do so.[51] The virginity of adult woman (especially those who are older than 25) is not appreciated in contrast to earlier times in secular circles and among doctors.[52] Virginity is considered as a lifestyle that leads to many health issues: 'You have to start living a sexual life and your heart problems and skin issues will disappear!'[53] Loneliness is the frightening word that many single women would use for identifying their marital status.[54]It is essential for a woman to have someone to take care of, to belong to and be in the company of. For many women quite often children become a source of emotional fulfillment and purpose that give aim to life. If a a single woman in secular society desires to have a child, she is able to find if not a future life-long partner able to take care of his kids at least a person who might be able to become a biological father. Even if this option is not workable, there is always the opportunity to appeal to contemporary medical abilities to make a woman pregnant without any man directly involved. In vitro fertilization (IVF) is a new method that has got quite spread use in contemporary society.[55] In the case of Kazakh Baptist single women it might never become an option for a way to have a child. The question of

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[50] Robert A. Jonas, *The Essential Henri Nouwen,* (1st ed. Boston; London: Shambhala, 2009) p.154-155.
[51] Sylvia Barack Fishman*, Delaying Life,* (Baltimore Jewish Times. Baltimore: Jan 7, 2011. Vol. 318, Iss. 1; pg. 5, 1 pgs)
[52] The article about the danger of late virginity was transferred from one Russian medical site to another where late virginity is condemned. 'The research of sexologists shows that sensitivity of late virgins develops very slowly [...]. Quite often they stay alone: only 15-17% of those who start a sexual life in late age get married. […] Interestingly, men do not trust those women who started having sex only at age 25-27. Men suspect them of coldness and insidiousness'. (translated from Russian) *'Поздняя потеря девственности' (Losing Virginity at Late Age),* (http://www.03portal.kz/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1895&Itemid=85), accessed 10.04.2011.
[53] The advice was given to a single Baptist woman, Olga, age 30, Ukraine, from the personal interview available from the author, 1.04.2011.
[54] K. Aune, *Single Women: Challenge to the Church?,* p.25.
[55] More than 3 million babies have been born by means of IVF in the whole world. Kirsty horsey, *3,000,000 IVF Babies Born Worldwide Since 1978,* BioNews, 28 June 2006. (http://www.mindfully.org/Health/2006/IVF-Three-Million-Born28jun06.htm), accessed 10.01.2011.

IVF is one that would not be discussed among Kazakh Baptists. Asking the question from Baptist pastors of what kind of approach would be relevant to the leadership of the church this sort of the answer was given: it is fornication, it is a lack of humbleness, it is a sign of selfishness, she should adopt a child instead, it is unnatural and thus cannot be right.[56] The singles themselves are not very enthusiastic about the method as most of them still hope to have children in a natural way and even condemn those women who deliberately become single mothers. 'I hope to have husband and kids. A child should have two parents!', or 'I do not want to behave like Abraham and 'help' God by intruding into His plan just because of my lack of patience.'[57]

c) Expressing one's sexuality

Drawing a picture of how sexuality and sex were treated in Baptist churches it seems the picture appears to be quite poor. From the age of adolescence singles have been taught that a minimum of physical contact with the opposite sex (only hand shaking was allowed and not even that in every Central Asian Baptist Church). Baptist women, being taught to be as little as possible in physical contact[58] with the opposite sex have endured a vacuum of healthy touching or a friendly hug because of the great concern of the church about pure relationships between the sexes. For singles matters of sex have been especially sensitive issues because they are deprived of sexual involvement and thus must wait until the fullness of life will come with marriage and sex. Reflecting on splitting sexuality and sex Pauline Steinmann, a single Canadian woman, describes it quite strongly: 'Although we know our sexuality includes all of who we are, even in the church we are guilty of confusing sexuality with genital sex. To some extent we have bought the idea that unless one has experiences of sexual intercourse, one is not a whole person.'[59] Another single woman, answering to the question if a life of full value is possible without a spouse said: 'It is very hard from the bodily perspective. You do not realize the physical potential that God put in you. Those who are married look at you with the sense of superiority and this is

[56] Due to sensitivity of the issue of IVF only a few pastors were ready to discuss the subject. Interviews are available through the author.
[57] Respondents C and D, from personal interviews available from the author.
[58] In one of the youth camps 13 years ago the young people, before going for hiking, were taught that the boys should not offer their hands in order to help the girls, when it was needed but they should find a stick or something that might help but also would avoid any physical contact. (from the personal experience of the author)
[59] Pauline Steinmann, *Singleness and Sexuality,* (Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology, V. 9, N. 2, http://www.mennovision.org/volume9-2.htm), p.69, accessed 25.03.2010.

very humiliating. It is possible to suppress your physical longings by hard work and involvement in ministry, but it will not help for very long.'[60]

Despite the fact that the question of sexuality and its expression was one that appeared in a very early stage of Christianity, for the Christians of the first few centuries sexuality and sex were considered us sinful and dirty.[61] The main teaching on sexuality was based on the Apostle Paul's teaching about singleness and marriage. Carl Olson in his studies of the tradition of celibacy refers to Paul's concentration on reaching out to the Gentiles. It required a specific teaching on sexual expressions due to specific carefree attitudes of the Gentiles toward the body and sexual life. In Paul's teaching we can see that the body was placed not less than a 'temple of the Holy Spirit' and viewed as something that belongs to Christ and is united with Christ. Paul underlined the tension between living according to the flesh and living according to the spirit: the second provided real freedom.[62] The development of this teaching went even further: 'to the minds of the fathers of the Christian tradition, sexual desire is to be resisted lest it bring humanity to the level of the animals.'

Within Christian tradition, marriage was understood as the only appropriate stage for any sort of sexual expression. Thus, there was no place for sexuality in the lives of singles. The only framework where sexuality of singles would be discussed was the subject of sexual sins: nothing positive would be said about sexuality of singles and it affected their own attitude to the subject. Although Christian singles are sexual beings and no one cancelled their sexuality, sex related subjects are likely to be ignored for singles. Also singles themselves feel awkward to bring their questions and concerns about sex to the surface.[63] A very frustrating part of being celibate is that 'God has given us a desire for sex and restricted it to marriage.[64]' It is often assumed that women have fewer sexual desires or lower sexual drives than men so they are not expected to stumble over the subject of sex. Knowing these expectations, singles in their turn pretend or some of them are convinced that they have to suppress natural desires even on a thinking level. Many of them simply feel guilt because the desire is present but there are no explanations regarding how to deal with them and sometimes single women expect or pretend to be in a way asexual.

[60] Uliya, single Baptist woman, age 31, Kazakhstan, from the personal interview available from the author, 10.08.2010.
[61] Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985., New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p.3.
[62] Carl Olson, *Celibacy and Religious Traditions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.112.
[63] K. Aune, *Single women: Challenge to the Church?,* p.20.
[64] Ibid., p.72.

2. They Are Skilful Enough to Survive in a Desert but still They Need Company.

Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty. Mother Teresa

Unmarried women develop their resoluteness and independence in a broader way than their married sisters.[65] Kristin Aune, from her British perspective states that single females 'are more likely to have higher general ability scores, and to be highly educated and in high status occupations, while single man are more likely to be members of the lowest social class or unemployed.'[66] In fact this picture will be quite relevant for the Kazakh Baptist bachelors as well. The older singles grow the wider the gap between single women and men becomes. Single women have better survival skills and skills for adaptation to the situation, however frequently they are unhappy and still dreaming of someone who would come and take care of them.

a) Non-traditional search for a partner: new opportunity.

The world is rapidly changing and things that traditionally would have become a reason for concern now have become more the norm. Our society is learning how to live alone and to enjoy ones own company instead of learning how to be a better member of contemporary society and how to better relate to the community where one belongs.[67] It seems that as virtual communication systems are improving they help people to overcome their inhibitions but it do not go beyond that virtual world.

The fear of loneliness sometimes forces single women to extreme decisions. The variety of possible ways of finding a partner, boyfriend or a husband has rapidly increased during the last couple of decades. There are a number of dating agencies, places where singles might meet each other, etc, but for Kazakh Baptists the Internet has become an appreciated helper in that vitally important search. There are a large variety of Christian sites that are meant to be places where lonely hearts will find their lonely another half. 'We connect Christians', or 'Here the fulfillment of Hopes' is stated on the opening pages of

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[65] Ada Lum, *Одиночество*, (*Single and Human*), (Russian edition 'Smirna' Ltd. Publishing House, Ukraine, 2002), (English edition: Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p.29.
[66] Kathleen E. Kiernan, *Who Remains Celibate?,* (Journal of Biosocial Science 20 (3), 1988), p.253-263.
[67] See, for example, a video of a young woman giving advice on how better to enjoy being alone and spending time in your own company. *How To Be Alone***,** (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7X7sZzSXYs), accessed 16.01.2011.

those websites.[68] Central Asian Baptists are still very suspicious of such sorts of help. The reasons are: taking the initiative Christian singles might intrude in God's plan and somehow damage it. Also it is quite embarrassing for a single woman to admit that her longings for marriage are so pressing that she decided to take this radical step. Sometimes those sites might simply look as if they were an open-market for singles where a danger to 'devalue people, and turn relating to brothers and sisters into shopping for the perfect outfit'[69] becomes quite realistic. However, the idea of an Internet search for a future husband might work in a few particular cases and it would be fair to say that there are a number of families 'created' by means of Christian dating internet sites.[70]

Apart from the Internet, there are no other ways that Baptists would use for finding a partner. There are no meetings in Baptist Churches that would be directed towards singles. In fact the year of 2007 was announced as a Year of the Family in Kazakhstan. All of the Baptists were encouraged to pray for the existing families and also for the creation of new ones but not prayer for singles enduring their singleness.

b) 'You always will be my daughter': parents-singles conflicts.

As mentioned above, family connections are very important for Central-Asian women. Especially those connections are felt when a woman is in her thirties and still single: father and particularly mother feel their responsibility to take care of a grown up daughter because she is single and so – not really independent.[71]

Most single women sooner or later start having problems in communication and understanding with their mothers[72]. It is quite common for a post-Soviet single woman to stay with their parents till she gets married: one of the reasons is financial limitations for affording a separate place. Usually this living together leads to conflict situations. Quite often, in the families, where mothers do not get enough love or attention from their husbands, they are likely to get some affection from their children: in most cases

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[68] For example, *'Самые Большие Христианские Знакомства от Мегапортала Invictory'* (The Largest Number of Christian Dates from Mega Portal Invictory), One of the most popular Christian Russian-speaking dating websites: the number of registered women is 16,626, of men 8,685. (http://people.invictory.org/), accessed 6.09.2010.

[69] K. Aune, *Single Women: Challenge to the Church?,* p.71.

[70] There are quite a few testimonies of how God has used this particular site for the creation new families. (http://people.invictory.org/index.php?page=testimonials), accessed 11.01.2011.

[71] Camerin Courtney, in spite of her not belonging to a Central Asian background, also refers to the same idea, *Table for One: The Savvy Girl's Guide To Singleness*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2002), p.61-62.

[72] Ibid., p.62.

from the daughters[73]. Such a situation is very common for most of my female friends who still live with their mothers: the mother has a feeling that her daughter is 'something' that originally belonged to her[74]. On this ground they expect daughters to fulfill their emotional gaps that the husband could not fulfill or simply was absent as such. The worst situation is when a mother gave birth to her child 'for herself' - 'для себя'[75]. The child was born with the intention to fulfill the mother's lack of love, emotions and acceptance. From the child's side, as she or he grows up, there might be an imposed sense of responsibility for mother's emotional condition.[76] Thus, it is difficult for such a child to find its own perspectives on life as he or she grows up: mother's problems seem to be more important. Here the insight of a single daughter of a single mother: 'In my situation I always knew that mother dedicated her entire life to me: so many times she could arrange her private life and get married but she did not. I heard it not once but often in her conversations with friends that indeed she had to make a choice between her own happiness and the happiness of daughter. It always sounded in my head.'[77] Sooner or later this confusion between a daughter's responsibility and longings for independency leads to different outcomes: either conflict or estrangement of the child from the mother.

Sometimes parental possessive attitudes to the child might be expressed in negative attitudes of parents to the daughter's friends and to friendship in general. If the parents at some point were disappointed or harmed by some of the close friends, this attitude quite often will be projected on the daughter. The phrases such as: 'you prefer your friends to your family' or 'they will betray you and then you will see that there is no a person closer than a mother' initially program a single daughter to be suspicious of friends and look for some tricks or to become reserved for everyone including parents. 'Definitely mother has great impact on everything in life: on the perception of the others, on divisions such as – this man is normal and that one is not, and not because it is true but because he is not mother's type. 'How it is possible to live in such a way?...'[78] reflects one single woman.[79] Quite often the parents' experience of life is something that allows them to see in advance the danger or mistakes that their child might make and they feel responsible for preventing her from coming to harm. Although the

[73] Paul Tournier, *Escape from Loneliness*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p.16.
[74] This was corroborated in a number of personal interviews collected for this dissertation..
[75] 'Dlya sebya' from Russian 'For herself, the phrase commonly used to describe a child that was deliberately born by woman, single or married to make mother's life happier and more purposeful.
[76] P.Tournier, *Escape from Loneliness*, p.17.
[77] Victoria, single, former Baptist woman, age 26, Kazakhstan, from the personal interview available from the author, 12.03.2011.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

parents' motivations mostly seem good, it simply pushes the daughter towards protection of the private space and of the right of doing or simply making her own mistakes. As Gary R. Collins puts it, 'by trying to keep the loved one in our possession, we end up losing him'[80]

c) Independent and educated woman with a cross in her private life.

The situation described by Paul Tournier that took place in Switzerland about 30 years ago to a large extend reflects the contemporary situation in Kazakhstan. He argued that in the functional society, women are not free because 'the function […] validates the person, and not the person that validates the function.'[81] In other words a person does not define a vocation but a vocation defines a person. In contemporary society people are forced to prove their value and this demands a lot. Singles especially have to fight for acceptance as individuals worthy of attention. In many cases they have to pretend to be strong and absolutely independent.

This contemporary time is a time of the proclamation of women's independency and emancipation as it never was before. Women's rights are strongly protected in many countries: a good education, a good job and financial independence have become accessible to a large extend. The necessity of a man's presence in the role of sustainer and provider has been reduced to the minimum. But the question of a man's presence is not just a matter of sustaining necessity. The emotional side of emancipated women has gaps that are not possible to be fulfilled in female communities only. Paul Tournier writes: 'More than any other, modern woman is in complete emotional and moral confusion because of her sudden emancipation. She suffers deeply in her confusion, and spreads it all around.'[82]

The independence of women has not yet reached its climax in the Baptist churches of Kazakhstan. It is highly appreciated to be feminine in the sense of being a godly humble woman, wife and mother. But does it really mean that all of the inner emotional needs of Baptist women are likely to be satisfied? As mentioned above, women's independence is not something that will be highly appreciated among the Baptists within Kazakhstan and quite often it is compared to the lack of humbleness. For many generations the main purpose of the life of Baptist women was to get married, to support a husband and to raise their children in the Christian faith. Actually it was the best choice to live.

[80] Gary R. Collins, *The Christian Psychology of Paul Tournier*, (Baker Book House, 1973) p.142.
[81] P. Tournier, *Gift of Feeling*, p.54.
[82] P. Tournier, *Escape from Loneliness*, p.66.

Most single women tend to have financial difficulties specially those Baptist women who are in their thirties and forties now. One of the reasons was prohibition by the government of accepting Baptists in the universities to get higher education. Thus, without a good education, Baptist women could not get a well paid job and Baptist men would have to work hard to provide money for the family. Also Baptists were against any sort of contraception and as a result the number of children in the family made it impossible for women to earn money at all. However, rapid changes brought by a secular society, the collapse of the Soviet Union and massive immigration, as the Iron Curtain did not exist anymore, of many Baptists to Germany and the USA became the crucial turning point in Baptist communities. Religious freedom that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and time of Perestroika increased a deep interest in matters of faith by the general population and brought many new members into the Baptist churches[83]. The majority of them did not have any idea about Baptist women's outlook and values. Many of the women had higher educations, financial independence, possessed the values of intelligence and were broad-minded. For the Christian men it became in a way a challenge. Also it complicated the choice-making and made the circle narrower. In a way the educated woman had fewer chances to ever get married than the majority of the Baptist female population.

The independent woman in a Baptist church faces the problems of communication and self-expression. Self-confident women who tend to have different achievements frighten men to a large extend. Especially it confuses Baptist men brought up in Christian families with a specific image of the particular role of a woman in a family which was brought by his mother. When these men meet an absolutely different sort of woman, independent and confident, this alienation and strangeness leads them to confusion and pushes them toward choosing someone for the benefit of their familiar image of a housewife. From personal experience a very ironic comment was made: 'So, now we will have to find of those smarty-boots or know-alls for you!' that actually meant that lots of studying reduced the chances ever to get married or considerable hard work in finding a life-partner with an equal level of education.

d) Role of the community and what it does NOT provide for singles.

[83] Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, *Religion and Politics Worldwide,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.113-115.

'If we do not know what the role of the single woman is, we must at least admit that there are many roles being filled by her. While others are busy analyzing the role of the single woman, the single woman is unobtrusively filling it. Although her place is not defined, she is already everywhere – where there is a need for love, dedication, and commitment. The single girl belongs to no one and as a result belongs to everyone.'[84] The phenomenon of a woman's singleness is an interesting thing: the contribution that singles invest in church ministry is quite often great but still they seem not to fit any social group in the church. Quite often pastors or church members simply do not know where to place single women so they chose an easier way of dealing with the question: just simply not to notice that this category exists.[85] Unfortunately communities to which those singles belong, quite often are inclined towards thinking that the hard work in the church was intended specifically for the singles because otherwise they would have nothing to do. Such an attitude leads many singles to disappointment and discouragement.

It certainly seems true that 'most of the conflicts of the single person are within the church community - the very place where there should be none.'[86]Quite often singles might become very antisocial because of how they feel in church community among their peers, etc. Everyone, single or married has a hunger for being in community. However, the community of church fellowship means more for singles than for married people. They hold dear the friendship connections and feel the necessity and need for community more than anybody else. But at the same time singles differ quite strongly in how they view and value life in community as compared to family life. A number of single women answered to the question 'Could friendship and community replace life in marriage?' The answers were: 'No, they cannot because friends […] have a personal life and cannot be near always when it's needed' [87]; 'perhaps it is possible in an older age, but still nothing can replace the family. It can be an alternative but involuntarily because you do not have a choice'[88]; 'it would be a mistake to compare friendship and marital relationships, in the same way we could compare the comfortable slippers with a pair of fancy shoes with high heels: they simply have different designations'[89]

[84] Frances M. Bontrager, *The Church and the Single Person,* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969), p.8.
[85] Ibid, p.17.
[86] Ibid, p.15.
[87] Uliya, single Baptist woman, age 31, Kazakhstan, from the personal interview available from the author, 10.08.2010.
[88] Olga, single Baptist woman, age 35, Kazakhstan, from the personal interview available from the author, 10.08.2010.
[89] Tatyana, single Baptist woman, age 30, Kazakhstan, from the personal interview, available from the author, 15.08.2010.

Definitely, a Christian community might become a place where singles find security and reliable support: the only aspect that needs to be made concrete is 'what sort of Christian community is able to become a second and sometimes even a first family for singles?' When speaking about Baptist communities one is not necessary referring to the real meaning of community. The majority of women are looking for guaranteed relationships and security in being loved accepted and needed. Taking in consideration those three aspects let us look at some church communities. Nowadays the tendency of the institution of the church is to become more and more equal to all other sorts of institutions. There is a greatly protected hierarchy; there are dozens of high-quality-well-organized ministries, there is a well-organized budget and all sorts of responsibilities and projects, plans and lists of 'to be done' – everything that would identify a well organized institution. Definitely, order is needed, but all of those small details are not able to turn an organization into a community. In such institutions the sense of relationship and warmth is hidden behind the walls of business and business dealings. The aims are meant to be reached by means of any price.

As the subject of the importance of secure relationships for women was touched, it is what in many cases the church community cannot give a single woman. The meaning of security or guarantees in relationships should be explained. Taking the ideal example of a family it points to the covenantal relationship pattern.[90] God himself made the covenant with Abraham and through Abraham with the all of his descendants. Jesus also gave us a New Covenant. In order to illustrate the notion of covenant and its importance for singles in the Christian community I want to share a story from my personal experience. I became a Christian at the age of 13; at age 17 I met a girl from my church and we became even closer than if we have had been blood sisters. We are the same age, very similar in character and even looked and acted quite similarly: tall, blond and laughing a lot. People would call us 'twins'. We participated a lot in the life of the church; we spent so much time together talking, growing in faith, sharing dreams and tears. Sometimes it seemed it would last until we got married but even in that case our friendship will not stop. We would try hard to participate in each other's life. A few years ago my friend immigrated to Canada and our friendship in a way stopped its existence. She faced a lot of difficulties there; I had to face my own in Kazakhstan. Life became in a large extend different when we were divided by thousands of kilometers and it was not a matter of becoming different persons: our life circumstances had been changed and we had to learn how to live in a quite new way. At that particular

[90] Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus In Contemporary Context,* (Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press, 2003), p.276.

moment I discovered that something was missing in that friendship relationship that marriage provided. This missing part is a covenantal relationship which is the guarantee of whenever you go, whoever you are and whatever happens your family stays with you. However it is very important and fair to see the other side of the coin: for some couples the marriage covenant becomes a burden of sticking to the routine, to the same place, to the same people, the same life.

3. Does God still care? Ups and Downs of the Spiritual Journey.

'There is no depression-there is only a bad spiritual condition!' and another quotation: 'If you are with Jesus you cannot be lonely!' Such statements sometimes can be heard from a pulpit in Baptist churches. They are made by preachers and for the average Baptist listener are likely to be considered as the Word of God. There is a great deal of truth in those words but unfortunately they provoke another sort of feeling. Being a single woman, struggling with loneliness and depression those statements are likely to shatter the last hope to overcome these problems. Looking at early Christianity it might be noticed that suffering (physical, emotional or spiritual) was not considered as something shameful: for example in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, Bunyan, Luther, Calvin, pain was accepted as necessary for growing spiritually.[91] On the contrary, if loneliness and depression are considered as signs of poor spirituality this approach prevents the organic spiritual development of a person and forces one to put a on mask which will hide the real condition of that person.

There are many singles unsatisfied with their singleness and observing others who seem to live a better life their feelings of anger are often projected on God: it seems that He loves others more, that He is angry with me – as a result, He does not want my life to be better or He just simply does not care.[92] Although many single women are mostly content in their singleness they often come to a time when they feel lost, unloved, unaccepted and absolutely unhappy. This time especially involves testing of the beliefs and convictions about a loving and caring God: a God who provides and God who promised not to forget or forsake. Most of them are questioning 'if that is so, why do I feel so bad?' Such a condition of discouragement leads to isolation from people and most of the time from God. It is called spiritual

[91] Philip Yancey, *Where is God When It Hurts?*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, c1990), Preface
[92] Valerie Clayton with Jerome Clayton, *Victory in Singleness: a Strategy for Emotional Peace,* (Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 2002), p.17-20.

isolation. 'We hide from Him… When we run from Him, He seems far away. And when He feels distant we ask, 'Does God care?''[93]

Also singles sharply feel the absence of God in their lives when prayers are not answered. There are many opinions, books, guidance etc., about how to make prayer more effective and results more guaranteed. Being single I have been taught so many times how I should pray for my future husband: fasting, a special way of prayers and persistency of prayers were included. Sometimes it seemed that the better God is given an explanation of what He is supposed to do and who He is supposed to send the faster and better a result will follow! Definitely the more prayers are not answered the more doubts about personal worthiness and God's involvement in life become.

It is a paradox but sometimes singles are expected to be more spiritual than others. It was said in one youth meeting 'If you do not have someone to go with for a date, do not worry! Go for a date with Jesus!' Such a replacement gives rise to mixed feelings: are those who have company for a date not in need of Jesus as much as those who are alone? Second, if it is supposed to be enough to go for a 'date' with Jesus, why is it still not enough, is poor spirituality a reason? It is a very common opinion, based on Apostle Paul's statement[94] that singles should use their singleness for holiness and better service to God. This discussion leads to another dimension of discernment of God's will: whether it is the will of God for some to stay single or not.[95] If God decides everyone's future, that means that for some He prefers the experience of a husband's love and for the others not. It is a struggle about God's fairness that remains within many single women. Denying the calling to the life of celibacy they get confused about why their longings for romantic relationships do not find fulfillment or why God simply does not switch off those longings?

In this chapter it was discussed what kind of obstacles or difficulties single women meet in themselves, in the community and walking their spiritual journey. In the next chapter I will argue that single women can and have to find a way for being free from different prejudices about singleness and be content, satisfied and happy in whatever stage they are at the moment.

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[93] Ibid., p.88.

[94] 1 Corinthians 7:34, 'The woman who is unmarried, and a virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband'.

[95] A. Hsu, *The Single Issue,* p.68-69.

Chapter III.

Theological Reflection on Freedom of Those Who are Considered to be Free.

-It is freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then,
and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. -Galatians 5:1

In the Russian language the phrase 'she is free' quite often will be understood as 'she is single'. Singles are considered to be free not only by definition but also because they are considered to live their life as freely as they want, not depending on obligations that marriage brings. The proclamation of freedom has vital importance in contemporary society[96]. In churches freedom is seen as one of the aspects of really belonging to Christ and His Kingdom. What does it mean to be free? Are singles freer than married and what hinders their freedom? For example, Rodney Clapp in his discourse on the subjects of singleness and marriage states that both are limitations of a sort.[97] Freedom cannot be viewed outside of the circumstances people live in. We are bound by place, time and community. We belong to a particular ethnic group with particular traditions and life styles. Freedom in this sort of frame cannot be viewed as an abstract thing, it has to have at least light contours that already might be treated as a limitation of freedom[98], but is there any other way? Human freedom cannot be observed apart from responsibilities. As created beings we are limited and we are free at the same time. We have freedom for decision making but we are accountable for the consequences those decisions bring.

Christian freedom, according to Bonhoeffer is freedom that differs from the common understanding of this word. God limited himself, becoming a human and became free for the sake of humanity. Christians cannot consider their freedom apart from being limited by the responsibilities that their freedom in Christ brings.[99]

The discussion on the subject of freedom for singles is necessary because many singles are not really free: they are not less free than married from their physical demands; they are more concerned about the opinion of the community concerning their marital status, self-affirmation and their place in a male dominated society; they are mostly occupied by all sorts of fears and uncertainness; they have to take all of the responsibilities on themselves. They need freedom of soul and spirit; they need freedom

[96] G. R. Collins, *The Christian Psychology*, p.141.
[97] R. Clapp, *Families at the crossroads,* chapter V.
[98] Ann L Nickson, *Bonhoeffer on Freedom: Courageously Grasping Reality,* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p.65.
[99] Ibid.

from the pressure of this fashion-obsessed, family-centred society. In the following section I will reflect on the meaning of freedom and what kind of freedom should be reached for singles if they are already considered as free.

'Whether or not a girl is a misfit in her society is dependent upon her own attitude and initiative.'[100]: says Frances M. Bontrager. Is that so? Quite a few of the books about singleness or written by singles show the only way for a single to find fulfillment is to deny their wishes and dedicate themselves to service. Taking in consideration the meaning of those sayings and their profound power they still sound like abstract ideas difficult to be lived out and not real or easy solutions for anyone. So many questions appear, such as: How to look in a more relaxed way on the bodily problems when the whole world says that it is impossible to survive in another way? What in God's opinion should a single woman should do if doctors say that a sexual life is necessary for being healthy? How can she be free from the idea that a happy life belongs to the married and others are either waiting or already hopeless? How can singles protect themselves from all sorts of pressures or if not able to protect themselves to at least endure. If freedom is to that extend essential for Baptists, to what extend is a single Baptist woman free to use it for her own wishes and needs? 'It is a paradox: we have freedom to interpret and teach others the Bible but we do not have freedom to marry whom we want'.[101]

Freedom in being ready 'FOR' something requires first being free 'FROM' something: starting from ones attitude to singleness, fear of loneliness, being happy and content with the current circumstances, etc. In other words, in order to be able to make someone's life more meaningful, singles have to find wholeness and contentment in their own lives. In this part my main concentration will be on a question of freedom in three vitally important aspects of human life: physical, social and spiritual.

1. Single Sexuality. Freedom from Suppression, Freedom for Expression.

Quite often Christian tradition is inclined towards a division of human nature into two substances: physical and spiritual. Some others would contest such a view, arguing that a human being is

[100] F.M. Bontrager, *The Church and the Single Person,* p.4.
[101] Statement made by Dr. Tim Noble during Workshop seminar at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, 19.01.2010.

an indivisible entity.[102] Within the debate about whether humans are divided into physical and spiritual or are entirely organic beings, there is the voice of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who looks at the question from a bit different angle. He suggests that one of the important aspects of Christianity is not a search of how to be released from ones physiology and its demands but how to find freedom to enjoy being in it.[103]

> 'If the body is rightly to be understood as an end in itself, then there is a right to bodily joys, even though these are not necessarily subordinated to some higher purpose. It is inherent in the nature of joy itself that it is spoilt by any thought of purpose.'[104]

Our bodies first of all are gifts that God has meant us to enjoy and should be celebrated. In order to be able to live a free life in the body it should be treated not as a source of sinfulness and lust but as a masterpiece that has been carefully created and moulded with the love of our Creator. This attitude is meant to provide a positive view of the body and its natural needs such as food, drink, clothes, sex etc. All of those were included by the Creator when He designed human beings.[105] James McClendon calls them needs, drives and capacities[106] that God equipped us with. He argues that Christians as all others have the same drives and needs but what makes Christians different is the '*manner* in which we practice in the common lot displays the Christian way; our share in the created order is shaped by our share in Jesus Christ-who also possessed these native drives, natural needs, and nascent resources of the body'.[107]

Our body and soul cannot be separated: '…we do not *have* a body, we *are* a body; we do not have a spirit, we are a spirit. What touches the body touches the spirit as well.'[108] Sexual and emotional drives are natural parts of human beings. The oppression or renunciation of those drives creates an unnatural environment for self development. 'Sexuality is the drive in us toward connection, community, family, friendship, affection, love, creativity, and generativity. […]How we express this love conveys who we are as sexual beings, made in God's image.'[109] Human sexuality is a dimension that affects every sphere of relationships and the way we interact with others. Through sexuality humans express their longings not

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[102] See, e.g., Nancey C. Murphy, *Bodies and souls, or spirited bodies?*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[103] A. L. Nickson, *Bonhoeffer on Freedom*, p.63.
[104] Ibid., p.65.
[105] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader,* (ed. by John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), p.489.
[106] J., Wm., McClendon Jr., *Ethics*, p.97.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Richard J. Foster, *Sexuality and Singles*, (in *Reading in Christian Ethics* / by David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw, v.2 (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1994-1996), p.157.
[109] Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lilies: Learning to Love Beyond Our Fears* (New York: Galilee/Doubleday, 2005), p.52.

only for physical contact but for love, care, friendship, etc. it would be a huge mistake to put sexuality on the level of instinct: sexuality requires emotional fulfillment even in a broader sense than merely the physical. That is why the Biblical prohibition on sexual activities outside of marriage is strict: sexual activities have power to create emotional and spiritual union. After experiencing such union singles have mental and emotional marks left and those marks are impossible to get rid of. [110]

Any expression of oneself, whether emotional or sexual, is impossible without becoming vulnerable. Reflecting on the subject of vulnerability in Christianity we may notice that Jesus' teaching underlines the importance of being vulnerable and vulnerability is to be considered as a way of redemption. Karen Lebacqz reflects on vulnerability in sexuality: any expression of sexuality opens a way to become vulnerable in front of the object of expression. Being vulnerable a woman opens herself for possible physical, emotional and spiritual harm. There should be a place for 'appropriate vulnerability', Lebacqz argues, which is possible only in the framework of marriage where being vulnerable is necessary.[111] Marriage should be the proper context where being vulnerable is safe and in the light of that vulnerability the sexuality of Christian singles should be even more protected.[112] From the other hand intimate vulnerability is necessary for both singles and married to be fully open in front of God as one who is beloved. Intimate vulnerability is something that marks one's preparedness to be affected by the other even if it might hurt; it is a sign of fully belonging to the other.

Talking about freedom in expression of sexuality the thing is that not much has been suggested about the ways of its expression. If, to take as an example, the better psychological development of children who were hugged by their parents, taken by the hands, caressed on their heads etc., can be compared to those children who were deprived of all of the advantages of parental care. As we grow the need for a hug or a touch does not disappear and if it was missing in childhood becomes even more demanding. Unfortunately, contemporary society is so much obsessed with the images of homosexual expressions of love or that a simple touch or a hug from a person of the same sex automatically recalls a picture of a problem but not of something necessary and clean.

The expression 'women give sex to get love and men give love to get sex' is one that shows that with women the sexual issue is more complicated than just a physical act. With many Baptist women it is not

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[110] From the discussion of the sex and its power to impact personal development, Dr. Parush Parushev, lectures for 'Church and Social Ethics' module, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, 8.04.2010.

[111] Karen Lebacqz, *Appropriate Vulnerability, A Sexual Ethics for Singles,* (in Reading in Christian Ethics by David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw, v.2 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994-1996), p.152

[112] I have explored this in greater detail in *'Dirty subject' or 'Gift from God'?: - Why Baptists in Post soviet countries do not speak about sex and sexuality,* paper for Social Ethics course at IBTS, Prague, 2010, p.10-11.

even a question of being sexually active: they endure a vacuum of elementary communication with the opposite sex, not even to mention a hug, a friendly touch, etc. If they would be able to become inwardly free from the inner inhibitions, guilt and the notion that sexuality itself is something inappropriate which the Baptist subculture puts on them, they would be able to live a more adequate and free life. It is not about forgetting moral norms or church dogmas: it is about treatment of oneself as a normal human being with sexual longings and needs but accepting that sex is not a link or a solution between loneliness leading to fulfillment of the thirst of a soul. Also, after being freed from embarrassment, women can find a deeper fulfillment in communication with men[113].

Singles can and should feel fulfilled in intimacy through their friendships, families, taking care of children, brothers and sisters, other singles, etc. Sexuality is broader than it is often considered to be. 'It includes the body and body image; relationships with people of both genders; the need for connection; spirituality; the ways we express who we are whether male or female, athlete, artist, or nurturer. Sexuality involves how we respond to beauty in the world'[114]says Pauline Staimann. It impacts our perception of things, the way creativity might be expressed, how our intellect is developed, and our character is shaped: sexuality is what defines a woman and a man and makes them different. Ada Lum puts it this way - once a single person feels the sexual drive she/he should be thankful to God that everything is fine with her/him. Sexuality is a potential that was given to us when we were born: it is a creative power that gives us willingness for communication with others, development of our esthetical taste and the ability to get satisfaction from our work.[115]Christ was a human as we are. He never had a wife but He knew everything about physical desires. He would not be a complete human being if he would have been freed from the physical temptations and passions.[116]Janie Gustafson reflecting on a celibacy and passion writes:

> 'Passion, as I experience it, is not something I consider dark or evil. It is a push, a drive from within, an energy which moves me into relationships with others. It is an intense thirst for intimacy, a yearning for real living, which at the same time affirms and accepts me as a separate

[113] C. Courtney, *Table for one,* p.124-127.
[114] P. Steinmann, *Singleness and Sexuality*, p.68.
[115] A. Lum, *Одиночество*, p.41.
[116] Ibid., p.69-71.

> individual. It is a passion which I hope will integrate all my inner forces into a single, fierce, and all-consuming love for heaven and for earth.'[117]

The meaning of Eros, as a definition of human sexuality has been largely misunderstood especially after Freud's works on libido and Eros, where he explains any human action or motive as a result of libido (following sexual instincts). However, in later works Freud makes a distinction between Eros and libido: Eros is identified as a 'the passion for relationship; it is the desire for goodness as much as for union and communion.'[118]

Celibates who deliberately decided to be sexually inactive, yet expressing their sexuality are those who able to build intimate relationships without being manipulative. Gustafson writes: 'true intimacy involves, first, wholeness from within, and second, a sensitivity to the other person, with no infringement upon his or her individuality.'[119]In other words, celibates have more capacity to see others more deeply. Diana L. Hayes, a vowed celibate woman, speaking about the importance of celibacy for the contemporary world in general and its values for the each single person:

> 'Now, in light of the rise in sexually transmitted diseases and abusive relationships, many others are beginning to acknowledge the wisdom of standing back and attempting to discern who one is as an individual and how one relates to others, not just for purely selfish reasons but in a very intimate world of give and take'. [120]

The way of celibacy is not an easy one to live because the contemporary world insists on constant satisfaction and highly values any sort of pleasure. Living in the absence of sex requires the hard work 'of getting to know yourself as an individual and as part of another's or others' lives in a deeply responsible and responsive way. It requires openness to periods of loneliness and self-doubt but its reward is great.'[121]Some of us are given the way of celibacy and commitment and others will step into another commitment of a married life. Both require inner freedom to make a choice and to live a fulfilled life. 'Either path is equally valid but both begin alone.'[122]

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[117] Janie Gustafson, *Celibate Passion, from Sexuality and the Sacred, Sources for Theological Reflection,* (ed. by James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Londfellow), p.277
[118] Ibid., p.278.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Diana L. Hayes, *A Sexual Ethic – Built Upon the Foundation of Celibacy,* (http://www.thewitness.org/archive/april2000/hayessexualethic.html), accessed 2.03.2010
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

2. Marriage and Family. Freedom from the Illusion of the Necessity of Marriage for Happiness, Freedom for Different Expressions of Family.

Singleness is not something that was God's intention from the very beginning. Also we will not find much about a Christian tradition of celibacy in the Bible because it is not there. '[C]elibacy as 'an unmarried state played no role in Jewish traditions.'[123] Woman's singleness as a deliberate choice would not make any sense in that society. The idea of celibacy came to the early Christianity only in the end of the second and beginning of the third century, being inspired by the example of Jesus and the Apostle Paul[124]. We will not find much teaching of Jesus on the topic of celibacy, however, He mentioned 'eunuchs' (Matthew 19:22) who were whether born this way, made such by people or made their deliberate choice for the sake of God's Kingdom. In this context the teaching on celibacy and the virtue of singleness should be viewed as a tradition of the church that has its root in very early Christianity. The theme of celibacy emerged out of the way Christians saw their lives in times when the expectation was that Jesus would return soon and thus, their concentration and priorities were on sharing the good news and reaching as many sinners as possible. [125] Another side of that was purification and righteous living: 'they would renounce marriage and await the coming of Jesus 'holy in body and spirit'[126] Paul's teaching on singleness cannot be found in his writings other than his letter to Corinthians.

Marriage is a wonderful thing but having a mate or a spouse does not necessarily mean absolute happiness. The Bible never says that the married are a privileged society of happier people. On the contrary, Apostle Paul refers to advantages that unmarried Christians have (1 Corinth.7). One might argue that all of the examples from the New Testament about successful singlehood refer to males only (Paul, Jesus) and that being men they were not so inclined towards having a family because of the differences between the priorities of men and women concerning life.[127]. What seems to be true is that women have more survival skills from loneliness than men.[128] This does not prove the wrongness of the idea that marriage is no longer important or needed, but approaches it with a more sober attitude. This is common truth: everyone needs fellowship or the partnership of a soul mate: not necessarily of a

[123] C. Olson, *Celibacy and Religious Traditions*, p.110.
[124] Paul's teachings have the significant importance especially for the Eastern European Baptists and their doctrinal formation. Dr. Keith Grant Jones, rector of International Baptist Theological Seminary, from the personal interview available from the author, 5.05.2011.
[125] C. Olson, *Celibacy and Religious Traditions,* p.110.
[126] Ibid., p.112.
[127] It is crucial for the majority of women to have a family, to love and to be loved and to have someone to take care of, especially to care for children.
[128] K. Aune, *Single women: Challenge to the Church?*, p.7.

spouse but definitely of a person who is able to be engaged and address the issue of loneliness even if not to the same extend but at least close to our perception of loneliness. By finding only one person who will respond to our expectations we put ourselves in danger of deep affection and thus in a situation of risk. In case that person betrays, dies, leaves us for any other reason, the fear of being abandoned again blockades or hinders us from going into another kind of relationship. That is a guaranteed way to loneliness.

Tournier argues that the feeling of loneliness is not only a feature of the 'nervous and withdrawn'.[129] It is a global catastrophe of our age. In the light of this problem so much hope is put not in marriage itself but at least in romantic relationships. Those relationships in their varieties (in today's society cohabitation has became almost equal to marriage) are promoted in media, romantic books, movies, etc., as places where all worries and loneliness will pass away. We see a picture of the happy spouses raising their happy children and all of their troubles disappear as soon as they step in the cozy haven. Christianity provides an even broader view on the family in the sense that the family is sustained by God and is more likely to be an example of 'living happily ever after'. But reality shows that most families, Christian or not, are unable to answer this sort of expectation.[130]
Reflecting on the subject of Christian marriage Stanley Hauerwas writes:

> 'The fact that marriage is for Christians a vocation rather than a requirement gives it a new dignity. For the Christian, marriage cannot and must not be seen as a necessary means for self-fulfillment. Christians are not called to marriage for 'fulfillment', but for the upbuilding of that community called church. '[131]

Stanley Hauerwas argues that both singleness and marriage are very important from the perspective of God's Kingdom. From the beginning singleness was much appreciated and encouraged by the early church which was sure of the swift second coming of Christ and saw its purpose in giving up everything for the Kingdom of God.[132] It was not simply a question of being sexual inactive but the much more important question of giving up heirs. It is worthy of attention that those sacrifices for the Kingdom's sake were made out of inner freedom from pressure of necessity of having a family. That

[129] P. Tournier, *Escape from Loneliness*, p.19.
[130] S. Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas reader*, p.510.
[131] Ibid., p.512.
[132] David G. Hunter, *Marriage in The Early Church*, translated and edited by David G. Hunter, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p.2-5.

freedom in a large extend was provided by the perspective of the church where all of the future was concentrated. Hauerwas writes: 'If singleness is a symbol of the church's confidence in God's power to affect lives for the growth of the church, marriage and procreation are the symbols of the church's understanding that the struggle will be long and arduous.'[133]Stanley Hauerwas puts it in a way that:

> 'Singleness embodies the Christian hope that God's kingdom has come, is present, and is still to come. Accordingly, we cannot help but witness this good news to others. […] Christian justification of the family may often be the result that Christians no longer believe the Gospel is true or joyful.'[134]

Olson observed[135] how through the history of Christianity different sort of debates concerning marriage and celibacy have been held. Christian tradition at different stages was moving towards support of one or another marital status. In various circumstances Christianity adopted different views on the subject that would most relate to their particular circumstances. For example, in the story of Protestantism we can see the movement in sort of a circle, starting with Martin Luther, who valued/estimated marriages as superior to celibacy and Karl Barth who put marriage and celibacy on an equal stage. Karl Barth in his 'Church dogmatics' writes:

> 'The Christian enters into marriage, not on the basis of a natural necessity, but on that of a special spiritual gift and vocation within his life history and the history of salvation [...]. He does so in the freedom of the Spirit [...]. [This same freedom] is recalled by the opposing freedom of the same Spirit [...] that of not marrying [...]. There is a genuine Christian obedience which does not lead a man into marriage but past it [...]. Paul's teaching [in 1 Cor. 7] is the Magna Carta of all who are unmarried, to which we would only add the warning that they should understand and exercise their voluntary or involuntary celibacy as a matter of Christian obedience as Paul did.'[136]

Here Barth underlines the matter of freedom that Christians have in making the choice to be married or not, and this freedom has to be a measurement for any action in the life of a disciple of Christ. It is important for singles to keep in mind that marriage will not sort out all of the problems that singles meet. Life just passes by when it is a life of expectations of a 'real life': by a real life singles quite often mean marriage.[137] This is the vicious circle of what happens to dreams when they become true: with time what was a dream now becomes a routine part of life and new dreams are needed. Singleness

[133] S. Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas reader,* p.499.
[134] Ibid., p.512.
[135] C. Olson, *Celibacy and religious traditions*, p.114-127.
[136] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 4, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), p.148.
[137] Paul Tournier, *A Place for You: Psychology and Religion,* (London : SCM Press LTD, 1968), p.37.

is full of hardships but marriage disappointments are also an unavoidable part of those 'who are on the other side'. The main thing that singles and married have to learn from every condition of life is to live in freedom, to be free. It is not freedom as a marital status: it is freedom from being obsessed by the idea that life can be fulfilled only in marriage or the idea that someone is not a complete person if that someone is single: all of those sorts of 'ideas' that make singles not only depressed, stressed and in despair but also enslave them to life circumstances[138]. The time of expectation is the time of not really living; it is the wasting of precious time and energy[139]. John Landgraf argues that

> 'For single Christians, […] it is not romantic love and romantic togetherness […] that enables creative living. [R]omantic love never enables one to love the unlovable in oneself, the ugliness we all have in us. For Christians who acknowledge his lordship, Jesus does seem to enable that quality of love in their lives, this self-acceptance.'[140]

It is unfortunate that those vital things might be understood only after years of ones life have been consumed with waiting and expecting "Prince Charming" to come along. The way of discovering and loving ones single self is a journey which can only be undertaken personally. It is not a journey which must be a lonely one since learning to love oneself as a single will require also the love and support of others who are also single or though married understand and reach out to a single learning his/her fullness of life. It is essential for single women first to become free from the idea that marriage saves and life starts only after the church bells are ringing! '[D]on't wait until marriage to start life'[141].

Freedom in singlehood might be treated not as something that should be taken away: it gives more opportunities that married life simply is not able to give. Contemporary singleness is an expression of freedom for being married or not. [142] Probably, for single women in a Baptist context it might be harder as they are not those who choose, but they do not have the necessity for a marital status just for the sake of survival as would have been the case a couple of centuries ago. On the contrary single women have more freedom to find themselves and to use their gifts and creativity in ways that married women cannot afford.

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[138] A. Hsu, *The single issue,* p.183-193.
[139] John R, Landgraf, *Creative Singlehood and Pastoral Care,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p.19-22.
[140] Ibid., p.28.
[141] Kathleen Nardaway, *I Kissed a Lot of Frogs, But The Prince Hasn't Come,* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), p.108.
[142] R. Clapp, *Family at the Crossroads*, p.106.

Rodney Clapp also suggests that singles are not deprived of parental care for children. He offers that 'Christian parenting is a task for the entire church. It is a responsibility even for those who have never conceived or legally adopted a child.'[143]It is a possibility for singles to become a parent for someone who desperately needs a family, it does not necessary include official adoption (which might be not an option for many single women due to reasons previously explored), but it would give a purpose for living as much for singles as for children. In a way singles are freer then married for giving their time and attention to the children. Also they can provide an actual help for example to the single parents or hard working parents, etc.

Singles have more advantages in the sense of mobility, they are not tied to places and communities as much as many married people are. However the ability for mobility of singles should be respected by the community where singles belong and not be abused or misused. Such freedom in mobility is an advantage for those who want to serve different communities and also to extend their circle of friends which is an important part of single life. Also singles are freer for expressing of their hospitality.[144] Unless singles remain living with their parents, singles have lots of opportunities to welcome others to their life and their home. There are always those who need encouragement, support or simply a roof above their head, but it is not only singles who can express their hospitality: they are also those who can experience that hospitality. Life in singlehood can be very creative and exciting if only singles will see that life as an advantage and not as a burden.

3. Life in Abundance. Freedom from Cultural Captivity, Freedom for Christ.

Where does your security lie? Is God your refuge, your hiding place, your stronghold, your shepherd, your counselor, your friend, your redeemer, your Saviour, your guide? If He is, you don't need to search any further for security.

Elisabeth Elliot[145]

'The only way in which we can really be free is to renounce our assumed independence by submitting ourselves to God.'[146] The experience of spiritual transformation is one that brings liberation

[143] Ibid., p.107.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Elisabeth Elliot quotation, (http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show_tag?name=stronghold), accessed 8.02.2011.
[146] G. R. Collins, *The Christian Psychology*, p.142.

from fears and gives a new taste of freedom. Freedom is contained not in increasing responsibilities but in a capacity to forgive, to be compassionate and to see beyond circumstances. Such freedom has the power to change lives and to give great self-confidence.

What is freedom? Nickson draws from Bonheoffer's insights saying that Bonhoeffer saw freedom as an essential aspect for creation of human beings in the image of God because the universe was created out of divine freedom. Only that part of creation granted the freedom of the Creator is able fully to reflect God's image and proclaim His glory.[147]

> 'Human freedom is not to be reified as an attribute, something comparable to intelligence or musical gifting, a quality or commodity to be possessed. Freedom is a relationship and as such can never be understood in individualistic terms, as my isolated freedom to express myself or to make choices, but must always be understood in social, relational and hence ethical terms.'[148]

In other words the freedom he mentioned is not freedom **from** others but freedom **for** others. God has chosen to bind Himself to human beings and this was His free choice: expression of freedom. Thus freedom is not an abstract thing but an action which always involves not only one person but more: humans can be free only in relation with each other. This notion of freedom shatters the individualistic approach of today's society. Bonhoeffer is not the only one who emphasises the crucial importance of the 'other'. Thus freedom cannot be viewed only as an act of release from any kind of boundaries: it also should be seen as freedom for deliberate choices for boundaries or responsibilities. Being free also means being fully free for God.

People who claim to be free because they cherish independence and individualism stay far away from what real freedom is. They are enslaved to their fear of being unaccepted and bound; they have problems with communication and are unable to live with others. Tournier sees the way to freedom for independent individualists in renouncing that fake independence and submitting everything to God. He is able to make people closer to each other and create a family from absolutely different humans not only those bound by blood ties '…the crisis of our civilization demands a restoration of the meaning of fellowship…'[149]

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[147] A. L. Nickson, *Bonhoeffer on Freedom*, p.56.
[148] Ibid., p.57.
[149] P. Tournier, *Escape from Loneliness*, p.50.

The way to freedom is to stop complaining about life circumstances, the unjust attitude of others and even God. '… complaining always brings about that which is complained of.'[150] Complaining is something that blocks us from peace, enjoyment of life, an adequate attitude to circumstances. Tournier sees the way out of the vicious cycle of complaining and self-pity only by forgiveness, love and admission of God's sovereignty for accomplishing His plans which are always good (Jeremiah 29:11-13). Acceptance of the circumstances, as they are, opens the way for affirmation that God is still in control of everything and nothing happens beyond that.[151]

As mentioned above, in many cases singles struggle with the question of God's fairness: if He is fair why do people not have equal life circumstances and some are suffering and for others life seems to be splendid? To understand God's fairness it is necessary to understand that God is not fair to humans in general. This is the way Valerie Clayton puts it: 'Applying God's perspective of the word *unfair* will set you free. God's definition of the word *unfair* is 'grace'. […] [G]race is the promise (or agreement) that God makes with Himself that he will treat us unfairly-that He will give us more than we really deserve.'[152]

Beside the associations with the word 'singleness' which were already mentioned, there is another one, and it is connected to the word 'aloneness'. Aloneness is not necessarily a bad thing if you try to look at it from a different perspective that Landgraf presents:

> 'The most helpful first step is consciousness-raising along the path to mastering aloneness is for each of us to discover individually the naked beauty of who we are. It is for each of us to celebrate our child-of-Godness, our womanness, our manness, […] – just who and what God intended when God made us. To do this is first to face and celebrate the fact that we are alone-which means also to celebrate the fact that we are free. When we actually lay claim to being alone and free, it seems to have an explosive effect.'[153]

Being single and celibate is not a sign of selfish freedom but a life of freedom and responsibilities to live it for the benefit of the Kingdom of God. It is not a half-life as others might think. As Diana L. Hayes reflects on her celibate singleness and the advantages and disadvantages she might have in it, she writes:

> 'Today, I am free to travel, to write, to work on behalf of others, to develop loving and close friendships with both men and women without the tensions that such relationships too often bring when the possibility of sexual intimacy is present. It has also required me to live with

[150] G. R. Collins, *The Christian Psychology*, p.143.
[151] Ibid., p.141-143.
[152] V. Clayton, J. Clayton, *Victory In Singleness*, p.62-63.
[153] J. R. Landgraf, *Creative singlehood,* p.28-29.

> loneliness and to feel, at times, unloved and forgotten. But it has rewarded me in the end with experiences and relationships beyond compare. Thus, for me, and I believe […] celibacy is a viable way of being in today's world, open to God's call, and free to respond often with very short notice.'.[154]

Indeed God is here for singles to meet their needs and to help them to live in fullness of life which is good. His Kingdom is present in each of his children and if singles still hope that someone, like a prince from a fairy-tale, will come and change their life, they do not allow the power of God's Spirit and His kingdom to bring those changes and give contentment even if it feels like something is still missing. Only God, and no one else, can empower singles to see the reality of life: its joys and sorrows, its depth and validity. Being able to see things as they are makes anyone free to make choices and to live life as fully as possible at whatever stage. Of course, the choice can be made in favor of loneliness, self pity or anger toward the whole world but doing that the meaning of the gospel and its freeing power is denied.

'Jesus was a single adult who demonstrated ultimate freedom in his living, dying and rising alone. Jesus' freedom is God's gift to a single person of our day. And that freedom is more really available now than ever before'[155]because in contemporary society singles are free to live in such a way as they think can bring more for the Kingdom of God and themselves. Jesus brought freedom from social pressure about how others ought to live life in order to be happy. In Romans 12:2 (Phillips translation) another single person, apostle Paul, writes: 'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good […] and moves towards the goal of true maturity.'[156] Henry Nouwen, one of the leading spiritual directors also was a life-long single. In his reflections he writes that self-blaming for difficulties in any sort of relationship is a way to deeper loneliness. By rejecting our good side we idealize others and thus put on them expectations that they are not able to fulfill so they prefer to avoid our company and this reaction makes our life even lonelier. He suggests: 'Acknowledge your limitation, but claim your unique gifts and thereby live as an equal among equals. That will set you free from your obsessive and possible needs and enable you to give and receive true affection and friendship'.[157]Nouwen continues by saying that the deep need for communion was given by God to everyone since the day we were born, but the places where we are trying to satisfy our need for communion are not able to fulfill it. The real fulfillment

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[154] D. L. Hayes, *A sexual ethic.*
[155] J. R. Landgraf, *Creative singlehood,* p.30-31.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Inner voice of love: a journey through anguish to freedom,* 1st ed., (New York, Image Books Doubleday, 1996), p.86-87.

comes only when our life fully belongs to Christ (Mark 10:29-30). His reflection on the subject of pain in our lives gives hope and a way to freedom: if we consider our pain as a specific personal one, we are likely to blame the offender, circumstances and God, but if we treat our personal pain as *the* pain that humanity shares and we are participants in it, we become able to forgive and help. Focusing on the pain of humanity but not on our personal pain allows us to see not only our suffering but the suffering of others and makes the bearing of our pain easier. He concludes that the way from anguish to freedom is a life-long one. But as we are on the way to freedom we learn how to be free as Children of God: how to 'catch the darkness early, not to allow sadness to grow into depression or let a sense of being rejected develop into a feeling of abandonment…'[158] [159] A similar idea comes from an American pastor who out the life circumstances lives his single life. He writes:

> 'My primary source of love for people is not being in their individuality, it helps free me from the trap of conditional love, where we have expectations, hopes or boundaries we set on people […] For me faithfulness, understanding and dedication are above all to the true Christian calling. For us it should be all about growing closer, more in tune with this Divine essence […] So, first and foremost, the Christian life to me is a life of being in an 'in-love' relationship first and foremost with God. The kind of relationship where everything else becomes secondary, this means a focus on prayer, devotion, faith discipline and commitment. It determines how we live our own lives inwardly'. [160]

If Christians strongly believed in the reality of life after death, many things would be changed. Christians would not try to grasp everything which comes their way in order not to miss anything and singles would not be in despair because they did not experience marriage. As Glen Stassen says 'All need a thicker understanding of the way of Jesus, and renewal through discipleship, following Jesus.'[161] It is not that the right answer to every question is 'Jesus'; it is just how deeply that name influences our lives and transforms it in the best way.

Finishing the final part of the dissertation I want to address the issue of Christian communities. Looking at the struggles and challenges that others meet: it does not matter whether single or married, addicted to alcohol or depressed, grieving or lost, I would like to remind all of us that being in the church community we all are very much interconnected and interdependent (1 Corinth. 12). As stated in a song

[158] Ibid, p.117.
[159] Ibid, p.94, 95, 103, 104.
[160] Edward C. Sellner, *Ordination paper,* available from the author.
[161] Glen H. Stassen, from the lectures on 'Church and Social Ethics' course, IBTS Prague, 25. 01. 2011.

which raises the issue of freedom: '*None of us are free, none of us are free if one of us is chained none of us are free'.* [162]

Conclusion

This work has concentrated on the subject of women's singleness, particularly single Baptist women in Kazakhstan. This work is not meant to prove that singleness is worse or better than a married life. Also, this work does not provide final answers to the question of why some women are single. What this work provides is several notions or ideas (not pretending these are solutions) of how the single state might be approached and accepted in various creative ways and how to live a content life in any marital state.

The first chapter provided an overview of the impact of the Baptist subculture on the development of women's identity and on the creation of a particular image and pattern of behavior of the Baptist woman in Kazakhstan. Also there is an observation of Baptist convictions concerning singleness and how those influence the lives of singles. The second chapter concentrated on the difficulties and challenges that the majority of single women meet and how those touch such aspects of living as physiology, social life and spiritual journey. The last chapter focused on the concepts of freedom '*from'* and freedom '*for'.* Freedom *from* presupposes the ways singles can live a life of freedom from prejudices and ideas that singleness is a sign of being not a whole person. Freedom *for* is about the ways freedom might have an impact not only in the lives of the singles but also the lives of those around them.

Finding of the purposes of life in adulthood is not a single's issue only, but for single Baptist women it is perhaps even more essential than for married women. Since adolescence most of the Baptist women have been taught that one of the main purposes of life is becoming a wife and a mother: as singles cannot fulfill these purposes they have to find other purposes of life and goals that will fill their lives with the deep meaning. Their lives in a way differ from the lives of the married majority who still see marriage as the only way for happy living and singleness as a stage of simple waiting for their turn to get married. The practical application of this dissertation has been to provide for singles a motivation for further reflection and finding the ways of living a free life of abundance and acceptance. Frances M.

[162] *None Of Us Is Free, If One Of Us Is Chained*, Written by Barry Mann, Brenda Russell, Cynthia Weil, Sung By Solomon Burke (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hv6sQXI1WY), accessed 20.12.2010.

Bontrager suggests acceptance as the way to happy living in whatever stage of life: 'the answer to single happiness does not lie in sublimation or resignation but rather in acceptance. […] Accepting makes life positive, exciting, and fulfilling'.[163] One of the main goals of this work is to encourage single women to look at their lives from a different perspective: even if they see many disadvantages in singleness definitely life in singlehood has a number of positive aspects as well. There are two ways of spending a single life: one is a life of constant self-pity and a sense of worthlessness of existence and another is a life of abundance and creative living.

[163] F. M. Bontrager, *The Church and the Single Person,* p.14.

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